DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 184 SP 039 867

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TITLE The Benefits of a Resource Mentor Program on Prospective and Practicing School Administrators.
PUB DATE 2001-03-00
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (53rd, Dallas, TX, March 1-4, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; *Administrator Education; *Administrators; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; *Mentors; Program Evaluation; *School Administration; Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS University of Nebraska Omaha

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature on the benefits of internship experiences for prospective and practicing school administrators and describes the Resource Mentor Program, implemented at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, reporting on an evaluation of that program. The program involves students choosing their own school-based resource mentors and professors integrating into each class a project that is relevant to the student's school. The study examined mentor and mentee perceptions of the program, noting whether there was a relationship between number of meetings between mentors and mentees and perceptions of the program. Data from surveys of graduate educational administration students and their school-based mentors indicated that both groups believed the program provided students real school experiences relevant to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they would need to become successful administrators. There were no significant differences between mentor and mentee perceptions. Both groups perceived that they were involved together with administration-related projects and that mentees increased their confidence in working on administration-related projects. Mentees who met with mentors four or more times were significantly more positive about the program than were those who met less frequently. (Contains 20 references.) (SM)

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ED 451 184

Symposium Title

Developing School Leaders through Collaboration and Mentoring:

Planning for Success

Section Title

The Benefits of a Resource Mentor Program on

Prospective and Practicing School Administrators

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A Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the

American Association for Teacher Education

Dallas, Texas

March 1-4, 2001

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The Benefits of a Resource Mentor Program on Prospective and Practicing School Administrators

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature regarding the benefits of internship experiences and their relationship to a type of internship--the Resource Mentor Program that was implemented at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and report on an evaluation of that program. Internships are the most highly valued experiences of students in educational administration training programs. Administrators who were asked which aspects of their program most influenced future behaviors, viewed their practicum experiences as most powerful and influential, even years after the experience (Calabrese & Straut 1999; Krueger & Milstein, 1995). Mentoring aspiring school principals by experienced and competent principals has the potential to be one of the most effective ways of preparing future leaders for America's schools (Muse, Thomas & Wadsen, 1992). It is not surprising, therefore, that recommendations are made for multiple and alternative internships to provide more diverse clinical opportunities. This allows for exposure to a variety of leadership styles, experiences at different schools and even outside of schools (Krueger & Milstein, 1995; Murphy in Murphy & Forsythe, 1999; Sizer, 1991).

Benefits for Mentees

The characteristics of quality internship or field-based involvement include: providing students with authentic school administrative experiences that connect theory and practice; opportunity to work with an expert; opportunity and help in understanding first hand the political aspects of administration; and access to networking opportunities. These characteristics increase the mentees' knowledge, skill, and understanding, therefore, building confidence in becoming an educational administrator (Kraus & Cordeiro,1995; Playko, l995). Regarding authentic school experience, the Resource Mentor Program involves professors integrating into each class a project that is relevant to the student's school. For example, an Introduction to Research course requires each student to work with their Resource Mentor in determining a project for study that will provide needed information for the school, such as their School Improvement Plan.

Students choose their resource mentor and, therefore, can select someone who is an "expert" in the area of focus for that course. Students have the flexibility to choose someone out of their school, district, or possibly for a special need, out of education. This enables them to work with an expert in a wide range of areas (Krueger & Milstein, 1997).

Opportunity to work with an experienced administrator in handling political aspects of issues is perhaps the biggest benefit to practical experience. Political reality is very individualistic to each situation and, therefore, difficult to teach in a lecture format. It is one of those harsh realities learned best by experience (Hackman, Russell, & Elliott, 1999).

Students establish a network of administrators over the course of their program as a part of having a Resource Mentor for each class. They will likely work with three or four and possibly as many as many as eight or ten Resource Mentors. This builds up a valuable administration networking resource important both for information contacts and also for references for future employment (Kraus & Cadeiro, 1999).

A concern for teachers becoming administrators is "changing hats." Lave and Wenger (1991) have described internships or field-based experiences as a type of apprenticeship where individuals establish membership in a community and become socialized as an administrator. This helps transition from interacting with people as a teacher to interacting with people as an administrator; students learn to see the big picture-- not just their classroom (Kraus & Cadeiro ,1999).

Other aspects that have been cited as positive changes in educational administration programs in recent years and which are a part of the Resource Mentor Program are: it is a hands-on adult learning approach (Achilles, 1987); there is flexibility in the types of projects students might become involved with (Murphy & Forsythe, l999); the practical experiences enhance and compliment cohort groups (Milstein, 1993).

Benefits for Resource Mentor

Adults enjoy forming meaningful personal and professional relationships (Darkenwald, 1989). The process of having someone observing, listening and talking with an administrator about their daily activities increases their interest and professionalism. It provides opportunity for reflection and growth which sharpens thinking and skills as adminstrators translate their experiences for others (Milstein, 1993; Walker and Stott,

1994). Mentors may directly benefit from specific skills or information that the intern may have, such as skills to do a curriculum or technology audit, or some other facet of recent change in schools (Calabrese & Straut ,1999; Monsour, 1998). It also provides comradeship in what has been described as a lonely profession.

Through the Resource Mentor Program, mentors develop a link to the university setting. They have access to the library and networking with university staff regarding issues of their own interest. Mentors may be more likely to participate in university workshops, seminars, institutes and conferences. This mutual engagement may then lead to more sustained, purposeful and focused involvement on problems of practice (Murphy as cited in Murphy & Forsyth 1999).

Benefits for School/District

Benefits also accrue to schools/districts that participate in the Resource Mentor Program. Following the national shortage of teachers, there is also an increasing shortage of school administrators (Ferrandino, 2001). Thus, there is a concern with maintaining quality in hiring. As is stated in Daresh, Gantner, Dunlop and Hvizkak (2000), "knowing about is different from knowing how" (p.78). Administrators who have been trained in the Resource Mentor Program have a superior background in working with real problems in real schools. They are excellent prospects for hiring. Also, as described by Milstein, Bobroff and Restine (1991), the value of internships or field-based experiences to school districts is important not only in providing a highly trained pool of administrators, but also in providing district administrators an opportunity to see prospective administrators first hand for the purpose of evaluation for future hiring. Schools/districts and other related sites also gain by having more heads and hands available for administrative-related activities.

Benefits for University Professors

The Resource Mentor Program brings to each educational administration class, not just the Practicum class, the opportunity to learn from real experiences, expanding the type of learning activities that might be used. Professors also have the opportunity to form relationships for future collaborative activities and build a rich base for future research and writing (Milstein & associates, 1993). The field of educational administrator training is moving toward more and different internships or field-based activities (Duke, 1992). Participating in

the Resource Mentor Program keeps the professor on the cutting edge of the profession.

Benefits for University

An innovative and successful program provides important visibility both for the program and the university. This may contribute to increased enrollment in masters and certificate programs as well as students continuing with doctoral programs. It serves as a model to improve the quality of all programs within the university and strengthens support from alumni and the general public (Milstein, 1993).

Resource Mentor Program

The Resource Mentor Program as developed at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (Bruckner, 2001; Rippe, 2001) requires students to work with a mentor in each class as they proceed through their educational administration program. The mentors are asked to serve as a resource to discuss issues relevant to that course; recommend professional growth activities such as volunteer opportunities, committee positions, conferences or other linkages that may be of value for that course; and be a resource to the student as they work on a project assigned by the professor for that course. The Resource Mentor Program is further enhanced by an Administrative Growth Portfolio that includes the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) / National Commission for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Educational Administration Program Standards, and a cohort approach to grouping of students through their program.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

(1) What are the mentor and mentee perceptions of the Resource Mentor Program?

(2) Is there a difference between the mentor and mentee perceptions of the Resource Mentor Program?

(3) Is there a relationship between the number of meetings the mentees had with their mentors and the mentees' perceptions of the Resource Mentor Program?

Methods and Procedures

Design and Subjects

This study used a survey procedure to collect information from graduate students in

educational administration during the first year of their program at a mid--western metropolitan university and their school based mentors participating in the Resource Mentor Program. The survey was distributed to students in the classes that are typically the first that students take in the educational administration program. The students selected their resource mentors after an overview of the purposes and goals of the Resource Mentor Program. Mentors received a written explanation of the program and signed an agreement to serve as a mentor for that class/semester. At the end of the academic year each mentor received a survey through the mail.

Of the 53 students who returned the survey, 40% were in a elementary school, 11% in a middle school, 34% in a high school, 6% in a central office and 11% responded other (rounding results in total percents not equaling 100%). Thirty two percent had completed less than 12 hours at the end of the current semester, 49% had completed 12 to 24 hours, and 19% had completed over 24 hours.

Of the 68 mentors who responded, 39% were in an elementary school, 9% in a middle school, 37% in a high school, 12% in a central office and 4% responded other. Fourteen percent had less than 3 years experience, 37% had 4 to 10 years experience and 49% had 11 years or more of experience.

Instrument

The survey instrument used for both groups was developed by the authors to reflect Educational Administration Program Standards as developed by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) and published by the National Commission for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Demographic information was gathered relevant for that population and item stems were written to reflect that group. All items were rated on a 1 to 5 likert scale with 1 being strongly disagree, very little or negative and 5 being strongly agree, very much, or excellent.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent t-tests. Because multiple t-tests were conducted, a .01 level of significance was employed for each t-test to control for Type 1 errors. The independent variables for the t-tests were group, mentor or mentee, and number of meetings, 0 to 3 or 4 or more. The dependent variables

for the t-tests were mean scores on the survey items.

Results

Table 1 includes the means, standard deviations, and t-tests across survey items for the mentor and mentee groups. The mentor mean perception scores ranged from 2.95 to 4.10, while the mentee mean perception scores ranged from 2.54 to 4.15 across survey items. There were no significant differences between mentor and mentee perceptions on any of the survey items.

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and t-tests across survey items for the mentees who met 3 times or less with their mentors compared to those who met 4 or more times with their mentors. On the following survey items, those mentees who met 4 or more times with their mentors had significantly more positive perceptions of the mentoring program than those mentees who met 3 times or less with their mentors. Those perceptions included: appropriate opportunities to become involved with administration-related projects; appropriate opportunities to interact with administrators regarding administration-related projects; increased confidence in working with administration-related projects; projects that relate to the ELCC/NCATE standards involving professional and ethical leadership, student personnel services, interpersonal relationships, and educational law, policy, and political systems; and a rating of experiences in working with the resource mentor.

Table 3 reports the rank order of means from lowest to highest of all survey items for mentors and mentees. The two lowest and the highest ranked items were the same for both groups. Of the fifteen items, twelve varied by 3 positions or less.

Discussion

Mentor and Mentee Perceptions of the Resource Mentor Program

The perception of the mentors and the mentees of the Resource Mentor Program was positive. Mentors and mentees perceived that they were involved together with administration-related projects and that mentees increased their confidence in working on administration-related projects. Mentors and mentees perceived that they worked on projects related to the ELCC/NCATE Educational Administration Program Standards.

Differences in Mentor and Mentee Perceptions of the Resource Mentor Program

There were no significant differences between the mentors and mentees on any of the survey items. A rank ordering of the means of items for the mentors and mentees is very similar. The lowest ranked items for both groups were; financial management, resource allocation; and technology and information systems. The highest ranked item for both groups was in rating their experiences in working with the other. Mentors and mentees had similar perceptions of the Resource Mentor Program.

Relationship of the Number of Meetings and Mentees Perception of the Program

Mentees that met with their resource mentors 3 times or less were positive about having opportunities to become involved with administration related projects (M= 3.31, SD= 1.23), opportunities to interact with administrators regarding administration-related projects (M= 3.54, SD= 1.14), and felt that they had developed increased confidence in working with administration-related projects (M= 3.46, SD= 1.10). Mentees that met with their resource mentors 4 or more times were significantly more positive (M= 4.26, SD= .76; M= 4.48, SD= .58; and M= 4.30, SD= .82 respectively). Those that had met 3 times or less had mean scores below 3.0 on all items identifying an ELCC/NCATE educational administration standard that related to a project they worked on. Those that met 4 or more times had mean scores above 3.0 on 10 of the items identifying an ELCC/NCATE standard to a project they worked on and below 3.0 on one item. While those that had met less than 3 times were positive (M= 3.80, SD= 1.04) about their experiences in working with their resource mentor, those that had met 4 or more times were significantly more positive (M= 4.46, SD= .74).

While participation in the resource mentor program was seen as a positive experience by all participants, those who had met with their mentor 4 or more times were significantly more positive. Students who met 3 times or less worked significantly less on projects relating to an ELCC/NCATE Standard for Educational Administration Programs. Mentees who had more meetings with their resource mentors had more focused and positive experiences.

Conclusions

The Resource Mentor Program provides students in educational administration real school experiences that relate to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to become a successful administrator. The program provides students a rich experiential component throughout their training. This evaluation provides support for continuation of the program. Issues that may be addressed in the future include: developing a way to insure that mentors and mentees meet a sufficient number of times, providing mentors a better understanding of their role, facilitating communication with professors to strengthen the quality of the resource mentor projects, and examining the success of students that work with multiple mentors and that work in settings outside of their building or district. The Resource Mentor Program has become a valuable component of our training program.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-tests across Survey Items for Mentor and Mentee Groups

Survey Item	Mentor			Mentee			t-tests		
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	t	df	p
I have had appropriate opportunities to become involved with administration-related projects.	68	3.44	1.18	53	3.79	1.12	-1.67	119	.098
I have had appropriate opportunities to interact with administrators regarding administration-related projects.	67	3.55	1.12	53	4.02	1.01	-2.37	118	.019
I have developed increased confidence in working with administration-related projects.	68	3.60	1.09	53	3.89	1.05	-1.44	119	.152
Professional and ethical leadership	66	3.80	1.14	51	3.29	1.22	2.32	115	.022
Information management & evaluation	66	3.53	1.21	52	3.08	1.30	1.96	116	.052
Curriculum, instruction, supervision and the learning environment	67	3.75	1.15	52	3.21	1.27	2.41	117	.018
Professional development and human resources	66	3.41	1.20	52	2.96	1.28	1.95	116	.054
Student personnel services	65	3.57	1.26	52	3.00	1.20	2.47	115	.015
Organizational management	66	3.71	1.21	52	3.12	1.37	2.51	116	.013
Interpersonal relationships	64	3.78	1.23	52	3.29	1.29	2.10	114	.038
Financial management, resource allocation	66	2.95	1.17	52	2.54	1.20	1.90	116	.060
Technology and information systems	67	3.28	1.31	51	2.86	1.40	1.68	116	.096
Community and media relations	66	3.32	1.18	52	3.00	1.43	1.33	116	.188
Educational law, policy, political systems	66	3.42	1.19	52	3.04	1.43	1.60	116	.112
How would you rate your experience?	67	4.10	0.92	53	4.15	0.95	-0.27	118	.787

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Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-tests across Survey Items for Few and Several Meeting Groups

Survey Item	0 to 3 Meetings			4 or More Meetings			t-tests		
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	t	df	p
I have had appropriate opportunities to become involved with administration-related projects.	26	3.31	1.23	27	4.26	0.76	-3.41	51	.001
I have had appropriate opportunities to interact with administrators regarding administration-related projects.	26	3.54	1.14	27	4.48	0.58	-3.82	51	<.0005
I have developed increased confidence in working with administration-related projects.	26	3.46	1.10	27	4.30	0.82	-3.13	51	.003
Professional and ethical leadership	24	2.79	1.06	27	3.74	1.20	-2.98	49	.004
Information management & evaluation	25	2.68	1.18	27	3.44	1.31	-2.20	50	.032
Curriculum, instruction, supervision and the learning environment	25	2.92	1.26	27	3.48	1.25	-1.61	50	.113
Professional development and human resources	25	2.64	1.32	27	3.26	1.20	-1.78	50	.082
Student personnel services	25	2.56	1.12	27	3.41	1.15	-2.68	50	.010
Organizational management	25	2.68	1.25	27	3.52	1.37	-2.30	50	.026
Interpersonal relationships	25	2.76	1.16	27	3.78	1.22	-3.07	50	.003
Financial management, resource allocation	25	2.20	1.00	27	2.85	1.29	-2.02	50	.048
Technology and information systems	24	2.67	1.46	27	3.04	1.34	-0.94	49	.351
Community and media relations	25	2.52	1.19	27	3.44	1.50	-2.44	50	.018
Educational law, policy, political systems	25	2.44	1.16	27	3.59	1.45	-3.15	50	.003
How would you rate your experience?	25	3.80	1.04	28	4.46	0.74	-2.69	51	.010

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Table 3

Rank order of Means (lowest to highest) of Survey Items for Mentor and Mentee Groups

Mentor ranking	Survey Item	Mentee ranking
1	Financial management, resource allocation	1
2	Technology and information systems	2
3	Community and media relations	4
4	Professional development and human resources	3
5	Educational law, policy, political systems	6
6	I have had appropriate opportunities to become involved with administration-related projects	12
7	Information management & evaluation	7
8	I have had appropriate opportunities to interact with administrators regarding administration-related projects	14
9	Student personnel services	5
10	I have developed increased confidence in working with administration-related projects	13
11	Organizational management	8
12	Curriculum, instruction, supervision and the learning environment	9
13	Interpersonal relationships	10
14	Professional and ethical leadership	11
15	How would rate your experience?	15